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ABSTRACT

This article describes an investigation into the career-related experiences of 73 male K-2 teachers across Nevada. Data were acquired in the categories of perceived factors influencing men's choice to become a teacher, perceived factors impacting men's present level of enjoyment of teaching, and perceived stereotypes or drawbacks to being a male K-2 teacher. A matched sample of female Nevada teachers who answered the same survey questions served as a comparison group. Data analysis indicated that men entered K-2 teaching at an older age than women and did so less often as a first career. Male K-2 teachers were most strongly encouraged into the teaching occupation by their past personal experiences, namely, previous experience or personal closeness with very young children, or by anticipated future benefits, most notably enjoying children's personality traits, influencing children's early learning, and providing male role models. They were significantly more likely than female teachers to have been influenced by family or friends and significantly less likely to have been influenced by same-sex K-2 teacher role models. Men did not express concerns about potential job-related stereotypes and other negative factors that appear in other literature. (Contains 26 references.) (SM)

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Men's Perceptions of Their Experiences as K-2 Teachers

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Men's Perceptions of Their Experiences as K-2 Teachers

Mr. Brown was the first male teacher at Lincoln Elementary. Jenny wasn't sure what to make of him. When her mother asked how she liked her new teacher, Jenny answered, "Can't say. She keeps sending her husband."

—adapted from World Wide Web, February 3, 2002:

www.webschooling.com/jokes69.html

Men are greatly underrepresented as elementary teachers in the United States. They comprise just 17% of elementary teachers and about 2% of K-2 teachers (Allan, 1993; Sanders, Koch, & Urso, 1997; Wood & Hoag, 1993). Moreover, the proportion of male elementary teachers (and male teachers, in general) has been *declining* in countries around the globe—such as Canada, Japan, New Zealand, and the United States—for the past two decades (Boyle, 1997; Gong, 1997; Hill, 1996; Ministry of Education, 1996; Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2001).

Education researchers have paid little attention to issues surrounding the low and declining proportion of male elementary teachers. This seems perplexing in an era sensitive to issues of gender equity and diversity, one that promotes—for example—gender and racial balance within occupations. The popular press has devoted some attention to the issue, particularly in recent years. Journal and newspaper articles and press releases, in electronic form and hard copy, report the issue and call for men to consider the teaching profession, particularly at the lower grade levels (Brownell, 1997; *Calling Prospective Teachers*, 1999; Gong, 1997; *Push for More*, 1999; Turner, 1996; Walling, 1998). Entering "male primary teacher" or similar word groupings into a Web search engine shows that a growing number of articles and discussions on the topic have been appearing in recent years.

It certainly seems worth understanding this phenomenon in light of the need for quality elementary teachers. Perhaps half the population is being inadvertently and systematically discouraged from entering this important profession. Moreover, the low number of men in elementary, in particular, primary teaching denies students and staff gender diversity in their school's teaching faculty. This may represent limitations in the range of strengths brought to the teaching and learning experience. To better understand why so few men choose a career teaching young children, we need to know what encourages and discourages them from considering the profession, as well as the nature of their experiences once they do enter it.

This article describes an investigation of the career-related experiences of 73 male K-2 teachers from across the state of Nevada. Data were acquired and are discussed in three main categories: perceived factors influencing men's initial choice to become a K-2 teacher, perceived factors impacting men's present level of enjoyment in being a K-2 teacher, and perceived potential stereotypes or drawbacks related to being a male K-2 teacher. Several secondary topics, such as the men's future career goals and general issues of recruitment and retention, are discussed briefly. A matched sample of female Nevada K-2 teachers, who answered the same survey questions as the men regarding their own experiences as K-2 teachers, served as a comparison group against which to measure the men's reported experiences.

Related Literature

Research on the work-related experiences of male teachers of young children is fairly scant. The literature reported here, which includes some attention to popular-press media, describes the experiences of elementary—sometimes specifically primary—male teachers.

Factors Influencing Men's Decision to Teach Young Children

Male elementary teachers often enter teaching from other occupations and thus tend to be somewhat older than men entering other careers (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Galbraith, 1992; Shaham, 1991). Men at this point appear to have made a choice to preference personal satisfaction over financial reward or prestige (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997). Montecinos and Nielsen (1997) surveyed 390 elementary and preschool education majors at a mid-sized public university in the Midwest regarding their decisions to become teachers of young children. They found that female elementary education majors are three times more likely than males in this career path to identify elementary school as the time they decided to become an elementary teacher. Males who enter the field as a first career tend to make this decision in high school or college. The main reason both males and females had given for entering the field, a finding DeCorse and Vogtle (1997) corroborate for the males in their study, is wanting to work with children due to a love for children and a desire to impact their lives. The top three factors that influenced this decision were prior experiences working with children, a desire to model exemplary teachers they had had in their own schooling, and influence from family role models.

Male elementary education majors tend to show less interest in remaining in the classroom as they progress through their teacher education program, and some—39% in one study (Montecinos & Nielsen, 1997)—aspire to move into administration (Hill, 1996). Male elementary teachers at any stage face subtle and outright pressure to become administrators (e.g., DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997). On the other hand, 62% of the male elementary teachers in Ranson's (1997) study said they wanted to make a long-term commitment to elementary education; however, it is unclear to what degree this assertion referred to classroom teaching versus administration.

Beneficial Aspects of Being a Male Teacher of Young Children

Male elementary teachers name a number of things they find appealing about their occupation, some of which confirm anticipated benefits that led them to enter the profession. In general, they like their jobs (Ranson, 1997). One key contributing factor is their love of children. They also want to "do some good in the world" and believe they can make a greater impact with younger compared to older students (Galley, 2000; Ranson, 1997; Shaham, 1991). Some say the elementary setting allows them to explore new pedagogies and to teach more holistically (Ranson, 1997).

A goal repeatedly articulated for male elementary teachers is to serve as an adult male figure for fatherless children and a "model male" for children in general (e.g., Allan, 1993; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Walling, 1998). It has been suggested that male teachers may be role models for children's fathers and also model appropriate behavior for boys, which may help minimize discipline problems (Mancus, 1992; *Push for More*, 1999; Shaham, 1991). Participants in Shaham's (1991) study said they wanted to show children that men can be warm, sensitive, and nurturing. Some evidence exists that parents, too, increasingly want their children to see males modeling nurturing roles (Galley, 2000). Male teachers' very presence may send boys a message about the appropriateness of academics itself for males (Mancus, 1992; *Push for More*, 1999).

Mancus (1992) conducted a study involving children from two elementary schools, one with 33% male teachers and the other with no male teachers. She asked them to attribute descriptive statements regarding teacher competence to a cartoon-drawn male or female teacher. Students in the school with male teachers were significantly more likely to make non-stereotyping attributions than students in the school with no male teachers. Boys in the school

with male teachers deemed the male figures more academically competent than did boys in the female-teachers-only school, and they saw both the male and female figures as nurturing and authoritative. Because boys with both male and female teachers made the most egalitarian and non-stereotyping attributions, Mancus concluded that including male teachers in elementary schools might be most beneficial to boys.

In terms of their at-work experiences, some male elementary teachers say they are accepted by their female counterparts and tend to have good relationships with them (Ranson, 1997; Shaham, 1991). According to Ranson (1997), they also feel valued by parents and the community. (Some evidence, however, contradicts this finding, as indicated in the next section.)

Potential Stereotypes and Drawbacks to Being a Male Teacher of Young Children

A variety of stereotypes as well as suspicions have targeted men who serve as teachers of young children, more acutely so at lower grade levels. First of all, sentiment exists that teaching is women's work and that teaching young children in particular is not appropriate for a man (Allan, 1993; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Galley, 2000; Hill, 1996; Skelton, 1994). One man on an archived listserv posting (http://www.kdp.org/lounge/archive/other/65.html) said, "Todays' [*sic*] society does not accept the male, over forty, and probably unmarried to be in relationships with very young children." Although men tend to have an advantage in obtaining elementary positions on the whole (Allan, 1993), getting hired to work with very young children, such as preschoolers or primary-aged children, may be difficult (Galley, 2000). Also, any potential hiring advantages based on affirmative action or shared interests with male administrators can lead to strained relations with female staff members, who may question male teachers' qualifications (Allan, 1993).

Men may be deemed unable to be nurturing or sensitive enough to work with children (Gong, 1997; Hill, 1996; Turner, 1996). They may feel pressure to prove their abilities to parents and even colleagues (Allan, 1993; Galley, 2000; Hill, 1996). Their masculinity may be questioned (Allan, 1993; King, 1998), although Ranson's (1997) data show this to be a minor concern, especially among men ages 40 and older. Male elementary teachers may be assumed to be gay (Hill, 1996; King, 1998; Shaham, 1991) or to be sex offenders (e.g., Allan, 1993; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; King, 1998).

Being subjected to these stereotypes and doubts may make male elementary teachers—and prospective male elementary teachers—believe they are always under close watch and held to higher standards of propriety than females (DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Gong, 1997; Ranson, 1997; Hill, 1996; Turner, 1996). One 44-year-old said he has had parents pull their children from his room based solely on his gender, and a mother once stood outside his door for a full week until she felt reassured that her child was in a suitable setting (Hill, 1996). Some men report that many children, particularly females, are initially shy around them (Shaham, 1991). It has also been suggested that because the father is often the disciplinarian at home, some children—especially boys—are fearful at the beginning of the year (Hill, 1996). On the "flip" side, some men themselves experience a period of adjustment to working with young children (Shaham, 1991).

Male elementary teachers speak of the "fear factor" that something they say or do may be taken the wrong way, as in touching a child (Hill, 1996; Shaham, 1991). Ranson (1997) surveyed 274 elementary male staff members (two-thirds teachers, one-third administrators) in Canadian schools. More than half said these concerns both impacted their effectiveness as a teacher and altered their curricular and extracurricular activities at school. For example, many said they

never work one-on-one in private with students and that they avoid or minimize physical contact with students (Allan, 1993; DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997; Hammond, 1997; Hill, 1996; Ranson, 1997; Shaham, 1991; Skelton, 1994). This includes being alone with a preschool child in the restroom. In Australia, visiting professor Richard Johnson has conducted seminars regarding the no-touch "hysteria" in preschools and elementary schools (Hammond, 1997). Johnson considers this panic to be an American import that is most damaging to male teachers, who he predicts will be less likely in future years to become teachers of young children. Terms some male elementary teachers use to describe themselves in their work—as a result of these types of experiences—include misunderstood, mistrusted, unwelcome, lonely, and even that of having a repulsive image (Gong, 1997; Shaham, 1991; Turner, 1996).

The low job status of the teaching profession may affect male teachers more negatively than female teachers (Ranson, 1997; Hill, 1996). DeCorse and Vogtle (1997) say, "Characterizing the classroom teacher as female, subservient, and second-rate makes it unlikely that males will choose teaching, even when predisposed to do so.... Men moving into traditionally female jobs are perceived as stepping down in status" (p. 38). The low salary is another major drawback (Galley, 2000; Hill, 1996; Montecinos & Nielsen, 1997; *Push for More*, 1999; Ranson, 1997; Turner, 1996). It is more common for men than women to feel or actually be responsible for a family's main income. Their low salary led three of the five male preschool teachers in Shaham's (1991) ethnographic research to feel inferior to their preschoolers' parents. Moreover, they believed that society sees them as failures.

Some male teachers find teaching elementary school does not lend itself to coaching sports above the elementary level (Gong, 1997). The school day may end later than that of the middle or high school, and elementary teachers are not physically located where practices and games

take place or where their team members attend school. Moreover, some men believe they are negatively prejudged if they participate in or have an interest in athletics or coaching sports (Allan, 1993). Coaching may be alluring to some men not only due to their interest in sports, but also to the opportunity it offers for extra income. On the other hand, evidence shows that male elementary teachers may face a greater expectation to coach sports teams or conduct physical education at the elementary level, which they may or may not welcome (Coulter & McNay, 1995; Ranson, 1997). Finally, men encounter greater expectations to be accomplished disciplinarians and to assume responsibility for taking students with behavior problems (Coulter & McNay, 1995; Galley, 2000; Gong, 1997; King, 1998; Ranson, 1997).

Summary

Men—who comprise a small proportion of elementary teachers—typically enter elementary teaching at a later age than women, and they tend to do so out of a love for children and a desire to make a difference in children's lives. The literature shows that they report many rewards in the profession, but they also face a variety of concerns and stereotypes. A number of possible benefits, such as providing male role models for children, may accrue from recruiting more men into elementary teaching.

Research Purpose

The purpose of this research was to investigate men's perceptions of their experiences as K-2 teachers. The primary objective was to identify perceived factors related to men's entry into and experiences during K-2 teaching. Secondary objectives included determining how teaching grades K-2 may impact the men themselves and their students, both academically and socially, what career plans male K-2 teachers have for their future, and how more men might be recruited into K-2 teaching.

Research Method

Sample

The sample included 148 K-2 public school teachers out of 372 survey recipients from across Nevada. This represents a 40% response rate. Male teachers completed 73 of 181 surveys, a 40% response rate, and a matched sample of female teachers completed 75 of 191 surveys, a 39% response rate. Male participants were the subsample of interest in this study. The female subsample served as a comparison group against which to measure the male teachers' responses. Thus, "sample" as used hereafter in this article refers to the Nevada male K-2 teachers only.

The survey sample was predominantly White (92%) and married/partnered (79%) with children (66%). The median age was 38 years, and the median age at which respondents entered K-2 teaching was 29. The median number of years teaching was 6 years, 5 at the K-2 level. Teaching was the first career for 60% of the respondents. At least 35 of the 73 male teachers had Master's Degrees; however, an exact number could not be determined because not all respondents provided this information.

Design and Procedures

The researchers' knowledge of the professional literature, as well as their personal and professional experiences, inspired and guided this research. In order to acquire initial information on specific questions of interest to support or expand information found in the professional literature, the lead researcher conducted phone interviews with three—two California and one Nevada—male K-2 teachers. The participants were located by personal referrals. Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes. The men discussed their reasons for becoming K-2 teachers, what they liked about their job, what gender-based difficulties and problems their job entailed, possible reasons for the small number of men teaching at their grade level, and how more men might be

encouraged to become K-2 teachers. Information gathered from these interviews was combined with relevant professional literature to create the research instrument. The data-collection form consisted of a four-page survey for the male teachers and a three-page survey for the female teachers. (The instrument is available from the lead researcher upon request.) Female teachers were included to serve as a comparison group against which to measure male participants' responses. They answered most of the same questions as the men regarding their own teaching experience, which allowed a better assessment of whether the men's responses reflected gender-based or non-gender-based experiences in teaching grades K-2. Females' responses are discussed in this article only as they help to illuminate the male experience.

Several open-ended questions on the male teachers' survey were not included on the female teachers' survey (see examples below) due to their particular prominence in the literature for male elementary teachers. The survey consisted of a request to complete optional demographic information, followed by quantitative and then qualitative items. Quantitative items included four-point, Likert-scale-type statements related to the three primary research questions. Respondents rated items as *significant* (4), *somewhat significant* (3), *somewhat insignificant* (2), and *insignificant* (1). The final part of the survey consisted of open-ended questions, such as the following:

- What are some ways you deal with these potential concerns [regarding being a K-2 teacher]?
- Did you have a period of adjustment to working with very young children? Why or why not?
- Do you believe you make unique contributions to this position as a male? If so, in what way(s)? [male survey only]
- Do you have suggestions for how we might encourage more men to become teachers of very young children? [male survey only]

The Nevada Department of Education provided names and school addresses for all Nevada K-2 teachers for the 1998-99 school year. Males accounted for 5% (181 of 3595) of this population. Surveys were mailed to all male K-2 teachers in the state. A matched sample of females was created by choosing the same number of female teachers in each of grades K, 1, and 2 as in the male sample. By counting from the first teacher listed, every nth female teacher was selected, n being the whole number resulting from dividing the number of female by male teachers for a grade level. For kindergarten teachers, for example, 562 females was divided by 16 males, yielding 35 to the nearest whole number; therefore, every 35th female kindergarten teacher received a survey. Numerous corrections were made on the state roster due to findings that some addressees were not employed at the indicated schools or—especially—that females' names erroneously appeared on male teacher lists. These adjustments resulted in an unequal number of surveys having been distributed to potential male and female respondents: 372 surveys received by 181 males and 191 females eligible to participate in the study.

Surveys were mailed in late April of the 1998-99 school year. A second mailing—to those who had not yet responded—was completed one month later (late May). However, the mailing occurred during a particularly busy time of the school year, and we discovered that the largest school system in Nevada had ended its school year at about the same time as the second mailing. Therefore, we completed a third mailing to the same teachers (ones who had not returned the surveys) at the beginning of the 1999-00 school year. After the final mailing, numerous uncompleted surveys were returned, noting that the intended recipients were no longer located at those schools.

The final sample included 148 of the 372 eligible Nevada teachers who were mailed surveys. These figures include 73 of 181 males (40%) and 75 of 191 females (39%). We believe

the overall 40% return rate is a reasonably good response, given the poor timing of the mailings and the lengthiness of the surveys.

Some items that were qualitative in nature were also quantified for later analysis. Samples include: "Do you believe you make unique contributions to this position as a male?" and "Do you believe working with very young children has changed you in any way(s)?" Following training by the lead researcher, two Graduate Assistants independently classified written responses as yes-no or yes-somewhat/maybe-no, in other words, two or three categories. The coders compared their scores for individual items and discussed discrepant ratings until they reached agreement, calling upon the lead researcher for a final judgment as needed.

Data Analysis

Medians were figured for describing some demographic information, such as number of years of teaching experience. Frequency counts were converted to percents for presenting other demographic data and participant background information expressed as yes-or-no responses. Three demographic-information items—age at entry into teaching grades K-2, number of years teaching, and number of years teaching grades K-2—were compared to the female participants using two-sample t-tests for independent groups, testing for significance using two-tailed probability. A chi-square analysis was performed on the frequency counts for each of the three yes-or-no-response items to test the null hypothesis that the relative frequencies of responses in these two categories would be the same for the male and female participants. Responses to the Likert-type-scale items were tallied as frequency counts, which were converted to percents for presentation in tables. The "significant" category was obtained by combining ratings of 3 and 4 on the scale, and the "insignificant" category was obtained by combining frequency counts for ratings of 1 and 2 (4 = significant, 3 = somewhat significant, 2 = somewhat insignificant, 1 =

insignificant). Male and female responses in these collapsed "significant" and "insignificant" categories were compared using a chi-square analysis.

Qualitative data, which consisted of narrative responses to questions, were analyzed using the grounded theory approach, "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 24). The researchers used their theoretical sensitivity, developed through personal and professional experience, knowledge of the professional literature, and insight gained during the analytic process itself, to interpret and group data by conceptual categories during a line-by-line analysis using open coding. Labeled categories were continually revisited and adjusted during data analysis. Three Graduate Assistants, with assistance from the lead researcher, independently assigned each comment to one or more of the predetermined conceptual categories in order to get a sense of the frequency with which various categories appeared. Due to the limitations of classifying responses by external interpretation, final tallies were viewed in terms of approximations and relative frequencies rather than absolute numbers. Finally, the researchers examined the conceptual categories and their relative frequencies to determine how they might relate to each other (e.g., in terms of causal conditions and consequences) and to integrate them into as unified a picture as possible with regard to the stated research purpose.

Results

Background Characteristics of Male K-2 Teachers in This Study

The male and female K-2 teachers in this study were of similar family status, with 79% of the males and 70% of the females being married/partnered. In terms of professional demographics, however, the men differed from the women significantly—as determined by two-

sample t-tests for independent groups—on several characteristics. The men (M = 32.25, SD = 9.24) were significantly older than the women (M = 27.20, SD = 7.87) when they began teaching grades K-2, $t(146) = -3.57$, $p < .001$. (Medians were 29 for the men and 23 for the women.) The men (M = 10.69, SD = 9.78) had taught for significantly fewer years than the women (M = 13.88, SD = 9.71), $t(145) = 1.98$, $p = .05$. (Medians were 6 for the men and 11 for the women.) Correspondingly, the men (M = 6.56, SD = 6.69) had taught grades K-2 for significantly fewer years than the women (M = 11.91, SD = 8.92), $t(145) = 4.11$, $p < .0001$. (Medians were 5 for the men and 10 for the women.)

A chi-square analysis showed that men were significantly less likely than women to have entered teaching as a first career, χ^2 (1, N = 148) = 7.95, $p < .01$. In terms of percents, 60% of men compared with 81% of the women had entered teaching as their first career. Asked whether they had had a substantial field experience (e.g., practicum or student teaching) at a K-2 grade level in their teacher education program, 73% of the men and 76% of the women reported that they had. A chi-square analysis showed that this did not represent a significant difference, χ^2 (1, N = 148) = 0.22, n.s.

Men's Initial Choice to Become a K-2 Teacher

Summary ratings of perceived factors influencing men's initial choice to become a K-2 teacher are found in Table 1. The following factors received high ratings: the personality traits of very young children (e.g., enthusiasm); previous experience with very young children; a chance to work with children early in the learning process; a desire to provide male role models teaching at the K-2 level; and having their own children or personal closeness with other very young children. Male and female responses did not differ significantly on these items (the females' survey included all but Item #4—"desire to provide male role models"). Male respondents

repeatedly expressed in their written comments—regardless of the question posed—a desire to provide a good male role model for young children, sometimes specifying its particular importance for mother-only households or for "at-risk" students. One wrote, "The kids need us. They're crying out for male role models—lacking in the home." Another said he provides "a role model for young boys. Both by being a male in education and by showing emotions."

Significant differences did appear —as measured by a chi-square analysis performed on frequency counts—on two factors: the degree of influence from family or friends or from same-sex K-2 teachers as role models. Family and friends had influenced more males than females in their decision to become a K-2 teacher, χ^2 (1, N = 134) = 6.36, $p < .02$, with 46% of the males and 25% of the females rating this a significant factor. However, same-sex K-2 teachers as role models had less influence on male than on female participants, χ^2 (1, N = 133) = 4.05, $p < .05$, with 23% of the males and 39% of the females considering this a significant factor.

The main explanations male respondents gave for how they had initially entered the K-2 grade levels were that they had chosen it from among available positions or that it was the position available or offered. These reasons were slightly higher than but did not differ greatly from that of the female teachers. However, male teachers were only half as likely as female teachers to offer a reason suggesting that they "always knew this was what they wanted."

Insert Table 1 about here.

Men's Present Level of Enjoyment in Being a K-2 Teacher

Male respondents' ratings of perceived factors influencing their present level of enjoyment in being a K-2 teacher are rank-ordered in Table 2. Factors rated most highly include: working with children early in their learning process; being good or successful at working with children

this age; the personality traits of very young children (e.g., enthusiasm); serving as a role model for children this age; appreciation by others for the unique contributions they bring to the position as men having a strong self-image; and serving as a role model for parents of children this age. All items shown in Table 2 appeared on the male participants' survey, whereas all but #s 8 and 9 ("helping to counteract stereotypes" and "being somewhat of a novelty") were included on the female participants' survey. A chi-square analysis showed no significant differences between male and female respondents' ratings on any of the eight items their surveys shared.

In their written comments, a strong majority of male respondents said they receive strong support and respect from family and friends in relation to their teaching position, based in some cases on having family members or friends in the profession. Their explanations included comments about having had "encouragement every step of the way" and "tremendous support from everyone in and out of education." Some even spoke of admiration, one writing, "It's almost to the point of ridiculousness that people are impressed with me teaching first grade."

More than half of the male teachers indicated they had not had a period of adjustment to working with very young children. The reasons given most often were that it "came naturally" or that they had had previous experience with young children. Those who had experienced some difficulty (almost two-fifths of the men) reported that they had to adjust to the children's ability level, the pace of instruction, the curriculum, or the children's personalities, needs, and learning styles. Female teachers were less likely to indicate a period of adjustment to working with this age level (71% compared with 62% of males reported that they had no adjustment period).

Most men (81%) reported being "very satisfied" with what they do, one going so far as to say, "I would do it for free if I could." The main reasons they offered are that they enjoy what

they do (in general), find it rewarding, and enjoy working with children. Respondents found impacting and witnessing children's academic and social growth very rewarding. One wrote, "What could be more important than teaching students how to read and be excited about learning." Several men made comments indicating that they were proud of their own effectiveness in teaching young children.

Insert Table 2 about here.

Perceived Potential Stereotypes or Drawbacks to Being a Male K-2 Teacher

Table 3 shows ratings of perceived factors that represent potential stereotypes or drawbacks to being a male K-2 teacher. Male respondents rated all twelve items, whereas female respondents rated just seven. The five that did not appear on the female teachers' survey (#s 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8) had to do with stereotyping about being a pedophile, stereotyping about being a homosexual, having no/few same-sex role models or colleagues, feeling socially unwelcome with colleagues, and experiencing challenges to one's masculinity or expected male role. Male respondents did not seem to be strongly influenced by any of the twelve potential factors. Moreover, a chi-square analysis showed that they were significantly less likely than females to consider "difficulty/effort gaining respect and trust from your students' parents" a concern, χ^2 (1, N = 148) = 5.47, $p < .02$. Whereas only 11% of males in the study rated this a significant concern, 24% of females did so. (No significant differences appeared on the other six items both male and female respondents rated.)

In their written comments, the men say they deal with these perceived potential stereotypes and concerns in a variety of ways. They most frequently mentioned that they ignore these issues or simply do not find them of concern, asserting that they "just don't care" or are too focused on

their classroom to worry about such things. Another strategy the men offered is striving to be the best they can be at their job, as in working "extra hard to make sure each and every student of mine is on grade level or above when they get to first grade." Some mentioned turning to others for support, as in talking with family members, friends, or colleagues, and even doing journal writing. Other strategies included remaining confident about themselves, their abilities, and their professionalism; pursuing outside interests and various types of mental and physical growth for themselves; and pursuing and maintaining good parent relations. Of particular note, numerous respondents made strong comments about measures they take to avoid possible charges of impropriety with children. The following comments are illustrative of the sentiments they expressed:

- I find myself feeling very uncomfortable and taking a step back if/when a student wants to hug or wants to hold my hand. I have all of my students give me a "high 5" on the way out the door.
- My biggest fear is that I will be seen as a child abuser. I like to team teach with a female partner if possible. Otherwise I keep the door open and try never to be alone one on one with a student. [Team teaching is a common phenomenon in the younger grades in Nevada schools.]
- I try to avoid physical contact with students as much as possible.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Selected Other Findings

In response to whether or not any differences exist between male and female K-2 teachers, men were most likely (24 compared with 1 woman) to mention that parents request male teachers more often for their children. One wrote, "Most of the parents are more interested in

placing their children in my classroom because they want a positive role model. The main reason for placement is because of lack of fathers and misbehavers who need strict reinforcement." Three other differences male participants noted are that they provide positive male role models or a father figure for the children, are granted or command more respect (from students, parents, colleagues, etc.), and are given more students with behavior problems because they are assumed to be better disciplinarians. Female teachers echoed the first of these differences (that male teachers function as a role model or father figure for young children, who rarely see them at these grade levels) almost as often as men, but they made little mention of the other two.

Male teachers suggested a wide variety of other differences. One is parent concerns or reservations regarding them as male primary teachers, as the following comment demonstrates:

> I find that parents tend to want to "check me out" before leaving their son or daughter with my class early in the year. A female K- 2 colleague of mine was amazed at how many parents have brought their child to my room to "introduce" themselves prior to next year. [Parents know their child's teacher well in advance of the new school year at this school.]

Other possible differences related to K-2 teachers' gender, as reported by male respondents, are greater initial shyness or apprehensiveness of students in male teachers' classrooms and differing philosophies or methodologies (e.g., male teachers being less likely than female teachers to "baby" students). Female respondents suggested a narrower range of differences and were three to four times more likely than males to say little or no differences exist between male and female teachers of young children. By far the most unique thing men believed they brought to the position was, once again, their contribution as a role model or father figure.

Asked whether working with very young children had changed them in any way, the men most often mentioned having become more patient and flexible, a response similar to that of the

women regarding themselves. As far as their plans for the future, most of the male teachers—by a rather large margin—said they planned to continue teaching at this level. They said they enjoy teaching students this age, finding it satisfying and rewarding. Those who did anticipate "moving on" typically said they needed a change or a new challenge, or—secondarily—that they planned to go into administration (six men compared with one woman). About three-fifths of the men believed they would become more satisfied over time as they remained in this job, mainly because they would have more experience and thus be more effective due to improved skills.

Male respondents were asked to offer reasons why men tend to avoid careers as teachers of very young children. Foremost, they suggested concerns about being seen as a pedophile or being of dubious masculinity. Next in rank were the issues of low pay and insufficient patience. Finally, other key reasons related to discomfort or lack of experience with young children, as well as with the students' age/maturity level. The male respondents were also asked to offer ideas for recruiting men into teaching at early grade levels. They suggested giving men more experiences (formal and informal) with young children, raising teaching salaries, and providing them with male mentors and role models. They suggested high school and college as the target ages for recruitment.

Summary and Discussion

This study confirms earlier research that men enter K-2 teaching at an older age than women and do so less often as a first career. Male K-2 participants in this study were most strongly encouraged into this occupation by their past personal experiences, namely, previous experience or personal closeness with very young children, or by anticipated future benefits, most notably, enjoying children's personality traits, influencing children's early learning, and providing male role models for children. They were significantly more likely than their female

counterparts to have been influenced by family or friends and significantly less likely to have been influenced by same-sex, K-2 teacher role models. Thus, men may more often than females enter K-2 teaching after some type of experience has brought this career possibility to the foreground from its likely place in the shadows of male career options. They may choose this profession more actively than females, who have had lifelong subtle and outright societal influence regarding an appropriate and anticipated career choice for their gender. It is unsurprising that previous experiences with young children influenced the men's entry into an occupation involving teaching young children. These experiences may be assumed to be more atypical for men than for women. This fact—working in concert with societal norms favoring females—may make actual experience an important catalyst in bringing the notion of a career teaching young children to mind. It also is no surprise that the men had had little influence from male teacher role models, given that so few exist at early grade levels.

Once they had entered K-2 teaching, the men in this study indicated that their main job satisfaction came from feelings of moral responsibility (influencing early learning and serving as a role model for children and their parents) and personal satisfaction (from enjoying young children's personalities, feeling successful at their work and being appreciated for their contributions, and having a strong self-image). The men experienced strong support from family and friends for their chosen occupation. They were, however, somewhat more likely than females to report having had to adjust to working with this age level, for example, acclimating to the children's ability level or the pace of instruction. Four-fifths of the men reported feeling "very satisfied" with what they do, speaking to the enjoyment, satisfaction, and reward that comes with the position. They, in large majority, planned to continue working in this position and believed they would become even more satisfied over time due to enhanced effectiveness

stemming from more experience. Thus, the men in this sample appeared to have great satisfaction with and support in their positions as teachers of very young children.

The most notable divergence from previous literature on male teachers of young children is this male sample's apparent lack of concern about issues reported in other research (see Table 3). Although the men in this study acknowledged the presence of and some influence by these perceived potential stereotypes or concerns (e.g., stereotyping about being a pedophile or being viewed as a low-status professional), they seemed to have the self-confidence and an effective bank of coping strategies for handling them. Their self-confidence in general and in relation to their teaching abilities mirrors the high expectations for success male teachers of young children reported in DeCorse and Vogtle's research (1997). Moreover, the men reported significantly less concern than the female participants about gaining respect and trust from parents. In fact, they claimed they receive more respect than females in their positions. One man put it this way:

> Usually the parent relationships are very respectful and professional, but as a male you are better able to demand respect and say to a parent, "You don't need to yell at me, come back when you want to talk, get out of my classroom."

A female teacher made a similar comment: "I worked with my husband team teaching one year.... He was very effective when parents came in with concerns (angry, etc). This I believe is the "male factor." They would start to argue with me, but not with him!"

The men in this study reported having parents request them as their children's teacher far more often than occurs for female teachers. (Some did acknowledge, however, that a few parents as well as children had initial apprehension with them.) They were strongly driven by their feelings of importance as a male role model in their position. Nevertheless, a minority of men did express concerns more indicative of the literature, such as stereotyping about being a pedophile

or child abuser. Although 73% of respondents found this issue insignificant, attention to the workplace experiences of male teachers of young children must consider the 27% for whom this was a very real concern. Similarly, about one-fourth of the male respondents did have concerns about several other items listed in Table 3. In particular, they expressed concern about being stereotyped as a homosexual, having no or few male role models or colleagues to whom to relate in their position, and being seen by society as unsuccessful or a low-status professional.

Regarding other matters, some men in this study reported being assumed to be effective disciplinarians and, as such, receiving more students with behavior problems in their classroom. This supports other research findings (e.g., King, 1998). It certainly may put men, who typically have less experience than women working with children, at a disadvantage when it comes to classroom management issues. In terms of general teaching philosophies and methodologies, men were more likely than women to believe differences exist between male and female teachers of young children (see similar findings in DeCorse & Vogtle, 1997, and Galley, 2000). Little consistency appeared in their responses regarding what these differences might be. Three women, but no men, believed that men are more textbook-/curriculum-oriented. Three participants (two men, one woman) stated that men have a greater orientation to mathematics, science, and technology in their teaching. Because these comments were raised and not prompted, they may lend support to King's (1998) contention that men teach more to subject-area content than women.

Recruiting more qualified men into careers teaching young children has been the subject of some discussion in recent literature. Walling (1998) points out that the very absence of men and minorities in teaching sends negative messages about the profession. Male participants in this study offered reasons why many men avoid this career, including—in particular—concerns about

impressions of being a pedophile or of questionable masculinity, low pay, lack of patience, and discomfort or lack of experience with young children. They suggested giving high school and college men more experiences with young children, providing them with mentors and role models, and raising teaching salaries. These ideas and the men's own experiences as reported in this study provide a foundation from which to begin determining appropriate strategies for recruiting more men into teaching in general or elementary teaching specifically.

Note that Nevada has a higher percentage of male K-2 teachers (5%) than the national average (about 2%). Also, the men in this study reported strong job satisfaction and relatively little concern about potential problems and issues for male K-2 teachers as reported elsewhere. It would be interesting to investigate factors related to this research topic that might distinguish Nevada in some sense from other states. For example, this study showed that both Nevada male (73%) and female (76%) K-2 teachers had had a substantial field experience (e.g., practicum or student teaching) at a K-2 grade level in their teacher education program. This preservice experience might have a strong impact on men's entry into younger grade levels in teaching.

Recruiting campaigns conducted or suggested in various countries include many ideas suggested by this study and also provide additional recommendations. These include familiarizing high school and college students with careers in teaching young children through career days, orientation trips to colleges of education, and introductory or elective coursework (*Calling Prospective Teachers*, 1999; Walling, 1998), highlighting the rewards of teaching children and men's potential contributions to this line of work (Galbraith, 1992; Montecinos & Nielsen, 1997; *Push for More*, 1999), and providing men with experience with children in a variety of settings (Montecinos & Nielsen, 1997). These efforts can be relayed through newspaper and television advertising and career-advisement materials (*Push for More*, 1999;

Ranson, 1997; Walling, 1998). Of course, financial incentives in the form of salary increases and scholarships are recommended as a means for encouraging more men to consider a teaching career (Freidus, 1992; *Push for More*, 1999; Walling, 1998). As a word of caution, Coulter and McNay (1995) point out that recruitment efforts must target quality prospective male teachers and that men will need special preparation to face issues unique to their gender, such as those surrounding physical contact with children. Therefore, recruitment and retention issues concerning male teachers of young children are more complex than simply adjusting male-female ratios.

Closing Comments

The research reported in this article indicates that male teachers of very young children bear similarities to those in earlier studies in terms of demographic descriptors and selected feelings and thoughts about their positions (e.g., a desire to provide male role models and expressed enjoyment of working with children). However, the men in this research—K-2 teachers from across Nevada—did not tend to share the concerns about potential job-related stereotypes and negative factors that appear in other literature regarding the experiences of male teachers of young children. Perhaps the concerns of a small proportion of men in this career are so striking that they color the image of the male teaching experience in a way that does not represent the population at large, or at least not in all regions. The research reported here shows that neither such national perceptions nor being a numerical minority in an occupation necessarily impact all K-2 male teachers in a negative way.

It must also be acknowledged that men who teach young children are a select group of individuals who may have entered the career because they have the support and self-confidence to ignore or minimize real concerns. These issues may be particularly important for men who

have *not* chosen to enter this career. Therefore, we must continue to entertain, particularly in recruitment efforts, the concerns expressed in the literature regarding male teachers of young children. It should also be noted that seven men (compared with one woman) offered written thanks to the researchers for the existence of this study and for a chance to express themselves on these matters. This may indicate that at least some men in early-grades teaching positions need support that they do not otherwise solicit. The findings of this study provide data to support recruitment and retention efforts for promoting teaching careers with young children to prospective male candidates. This information, combined with general knowledge about teaching effectiveness, is what we need to initiate action toward creating a more gender-balanced workforce of quality teachers of young children.

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Table 1

Perceived Factors Influencing Men's Initial Choice to Become a K-2 Teacher

Factor	Signif. (%)	Insignif. (%)
1. Personality traits of very young children (e.g., enthusiasm, spontaneity, affectionateness)	97	3
2. Previous experience with very young children	86	14
3. A chance to work with children early in the learning process	86	14
4. Desire to provide male role models who teach at this level	84	16
5. Having your own children or personal closeness with other very young children	68	32
6. Encouragement or influence by family or friends	46*[a]	54
7. Influence by male [female] role models who taught/teach at this level[b]	23*[c]	77

Note: Figures represent frequency counts converted to percents. The "significant" category was obtained by combining frequency counts for ratings of 3 and 4, and the "insignificant" category was obtained by doing so for ratings of 1 and 2 on the following scale: 4 = significant, 3 = somewhat significant, 2 = somewhat insignificant, 1 = insignificant. Men rated all items, and women—whose results are not shown—rated all but #4. [a]Significantly higher than women's ratings, using a chi-square analysis, χ^2 (1, N = 134) = 6.36, $p < .02$ (25% of females rated this item as "significant"). [b]Term "male" used on males' surveys and "female" on females' surveys. [c]Significantly lower than women's ratings, using a chi-square analysis, χ^2 (1, N = 133) = 4.05, $p < .05$ (39% of females rated this item as "significant").

Table 2

Perceived Factors Influencing Men's Present Level of Enjoyment in Being a K-2 Teacher

Factor	Signif. (%)	Insignif. (%)
1. Working with children early in the learning process	94	6
2. Being good/successful at working with children this age	94	6
3. Personality traits of very young children (e.g., enthusiasm, spontaneity, affectionateness)	90	10
4. Serving as a role model for children this age	90	10
5. Appreciation by others for unique contributions you bring to this position as a male [female][a]	81	19
6. Having a strong self-image	78	22
7. Serving as a role model for parents of children this age	65	35
8. Helping to counteract stereotypes of male-appropriate careers, behaviors, and interests	53	47
9. Being somewhat of a novelty or in a nonconformist/atypical situation	47	53
10. Working mainly with female rather than male colleagues	15	85

Note: Figures represent frequency counts converted to percents. The "significant" category was obtained by combining frequency counts for ratings of 3 and 4, and the "insignificant" category was obtained by doing so for ratings of 1 and 2 on the following scale: 4 = significant, 3 = somewhat significant, 2 = somewhat insignificant, 1 = insignificant. Men rated all items, and women—whose results are not shown—rated all but #s 8 and 9. A chi-square analysis showed no significant differences between male and female respondents on the eight items they both rated.
[a]Term "male" used on males' surveys and "female" on females' surveys.

Table 3

Perceived Factors That Represent Potential Stereotypes or Drawbacks to Being a Male K-2 Teacher

Factor	Signif. (%)	Insignif. (%)
1. Stereotyping about being a pedophile or child abuser	27	73
2. Stereotyping about being a homosexual	26	74
3. Having no/few male role models or colleagues to whom to relate in this position	25	75
4. Being seen by society as unsuccessful or a low-status professional	23	77
5. Nonconduciveness to a serious interest in athletics (e.g., discussing or playing sports with students, or coaching sports)	18	82
6. Difficulty/effort gaining acceptance, in general, and respect for your teaching abilities from colleagues and administrators	16	84
7. Feeling socially unwelcome or somewhat of a social misfit with colleagues	14	86
8. Challenge to your masculinity or expected male role	12	88
9. Mental stagnation/insufficient intellectual stimulation	12	88
10. Difficulty/effort gaining respect and trust from your students' parents	11[a]	89
11. Discomfort being in a nurturing role	8	92
12. Feeling personally or professionally inferior to your students' parents due to your position	3	97

Note: Figures represent frequency counts converted to percents. The "significant" category was obtained by combining frequency counts for ratings of 3 and 4, and the "insignificant" category was obtained by doing so for ratings of 1 and 2 on the following scale: 4 = significant, 3 = somewhat significant, 2 = somewhat insignificant, 1 = insignificant. Men rated all items, and women—whose results are not shown—rated all but #s 1, 2, 3, 7, and 8.
[a]Significantly lower than women's ratings, using a chi-square analysis, χ^2 (1, N = 148) = 5.47, $p < .02$ (24% of females rated this item as "significant").

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